

FELLOWSHIP FINAL REPORT

At the margins of neoliberal governmentality: the extermination of peripheral youth in the Brazilian Amazon region

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ABSTRACT

This research project originally proposed to analyze and describe the phenomenon of the extermination of peripheral young people in Amazonia, and to discover to what extent this politics of death (thanatopolitics) constitutes a structuring apparatus of the neoliberal governmentality, by operating a calculation of the value of the human in market-oriented terms, in an outermost region of the neoliberal capitalist order. With the Covid-19 pandemic event, this project had to be renewed to understand which are the normative frameworks and governmental dispositives at stake in the global government of life and death in contemporary capitalism. By the articulation of biopolitics, (neo)liberalism, colonialism, racism and security frameworks, this research concludes by proposing a new concept that function as a grid of understanding for nowadays capitalist governmentality: necroliberalism.

1- Introduction

The original proposal of this research project was to understand why, in 2019, more than 60,000 young men died violent deaths in Brazil, while in France, for a population barely three times smaller, the total number of deaths by homicide reached only 825. One could think at first of a kind of collective suicide, which would be put in perspective with a propensity of the French to protect their own. To reach such a level in lethal violence, there must exist a system at stake, and if there is a system, it must be identified, and its motives must be analyzed. The complexity of this analysis is to describe this phenomenon without falling into the traps of its localism and its contingency, to describe the normative framework in which it is inscribed, and to know of which social forces, and of which conflict(s) this phenomenon is the manifestation. To do so, it was necessary to go beyond the strict framework of public policies and “governmental” or “institutional” solutions. It was also necessary to think over the Covid-19

pandemic in a global context of the (neo)liberal government of lives and deaths.

2- Experimental details

In order to understand which are the normative dispositives and governmental frameworks that organize this government of lives and deaths, I had to identify the structures that could explain both the extermination of black youth in the Amazon and the way that Covid-19 pandemic had been governed in Brazil and other parts of the world. For that purpose, we used several concepts that permitted us to describe which are the governmental dispositives at work in both phenomena. I first used the Greek concept of *arché*, that leaned us to identify what is the rational and hierarchical logic at stake in contemporary capitalism. Second, we had to deal with the conceptual proposals of Biopolitics, Thanatopolitics and Necropolitics (Foucault, Agamben & Mbembe), in order to analyze how this (neo)liberal art of governing leads with life and death. Third, we had to study

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the critical theory that debates the concept of neoliberalism as a normative and governmental framework (governmentality). Linking critical theory of neoliberalism with the analysis of a bio-necro-government of lives, I propose to adopt a renewed concept of *necroliberalism* to describe this (neo)liberal framework. At last, I had to identify how colonialism and racism act as governmental structures in relation to these phenomena.

3- Results and discussion

There exists an intimate relation between liberalism, neoliberalism, biopolitics and governmentality. This node between neoliberalism and biopolitics is a governmental node, and should be thought about in terms of governmentality, rationality frameworks, strategies and dispositives. This encounter, in the node of contemporary governmentality, between neoliberalism and biopolitics, should be called *necroliberalism*. This governmentality, as neoliberalism establishes, is based on the utility of things and people for the benefit of market consolidation, i.e. capital accumulation and labor exploitation. It is also based on a government of lives that corresponds to this very same strategic goal. This government of lives (biopolitics) is also a government of deaths (thanatopolitics / necropolitics): the “natural laws” of the market consolidation build a governmental rationality and governmental practices that permit that, in accordance with an economic calculation of the utility of each life for (neo)liberal capitalism, some lives are protected, and others are “let to die” or “made to die”. In the necroliberal order, the *arché*, and its corresponding governmentality and normative dispositives are aiming at the same strategical goal: capital accumulation and labor exploitation. That is why necroliberalism is the governmentality that organizes a determined regime of domination over bodies, not only in Brazil or in France, but all around the world. This domination framework points at the identification of a “total continuous war” over bodies: precarious bodies, essential bodies, protected bodies and bodies “let to die”. The Covid-19 pandemic has been a paradigmatic event during which this

necroliberal governmentality expressed most deeply and visibly.

Racialized bodies, feminine bodies, and precarious worker’s bodies had been put in the most exposed position in the battlefield of this governmental war. That is why both the extermination of black youth in the Amazon and the bodies put at risk all over the world during the pandemic event are to be linked with a necroliberal art of governing that is structured through racism, colonialism, patriarchal structures and security measures that, combined, served as justifications to organize a social hierarchization of lives that leans to the legitimation of death.

In Brazil, the young black man represents that enemy that “should be killed” according to this governmentality. He is the one whose extermination corresponds to a guarantee of rights and freedom for non-blacks. Heritances from slavery and colonialism play their role in Brazilian social structures, as they also do in a global scale, through racism. From the Renaissance to nowadays, a similar security dispositive have been imposed on women, their bodies, and their social positions. As a result of colonization, the international division of labor had been gradually associated with an ethnicization of labor and capital which meant that blacks, or inhabitants of the Global South as a whole, could be designated as different from the point of view of human dignity, in relation to the (legitimate) custodians of rights. Investments, structural adjustments, and other forms of economic intervention associated to (neo)liberal governmentality have always composed useful technologies in a war against populations which, explicitly or implicitly considered as enemies, were the ones whose lives could be sacrificed so that other social groups and national communities have access to freedom, good life, rights and privileges granted to them by the warlike power of Capital.

Beyond the economics framework, the warlike strategies used by the dominants against the dominated are often expressed through the use of police force (“I can’t breathe”), the promulgation of laws (anti-terrorist, anti-immigration and anti-narcotics laws), security

measures (let's think about the differential risks lived by the workers during the Covid-19 pandemic), jurisprudence and the legal practices of penal law systems (through which the neutralization and the physical extermination of the enemy is often the more visible). These dispositives compose a reading grid as well as a normative code of action that make it possible to distinguish and intervene on the lives that must be protected and on the lives that can be sacrificed at the altar of (neo)liberal / necroliberal Capitalism. In the liberal and neo-liberal state, the bio-necro-governmental dimension is always verified: to a governmentality of “*make live*” assimilated to the protection of the “citizens”, corresponds a governmentality of “*let die*” and even a sacrificial “*make die*” of the surplus of humanity, whose lives no longer fit in the metastrategy attributed by the ruling class to the Nation-State. The sacrifice of “some of them” is the guarantee of a good life for “some of us”.

4- Conclusion

These considerations, in fact, are as valid for the French as they are for the Brazilians and Amazonians. In this necroliberal context, it makes perfect sense to observe social hierarchization as a separation between three distinct groups: the “*Good Life*” rich and their helpers on the one hand (small accumulators of capital), the working *Survivors* on the other hand (candidates for the increase of their own capital) and, in the last chamber of (in)humanity and (non)citizenship, the “*Living Dead*” (the social and penal outcasts, without any capital). Concerned to follow a model of life that brings them closer to the “*Good Life*”, the *Survivors* will support the widespread killing of the “*Living Dead*”, the degraded, the “humans without qualities” and without capital, scarecrows of their own social disqualification. The poor young black men could then die in the peripheral regions of capitalism such as the Amazon region, as well as in central capitalism during biopolitical events such as Covid-19 pandemic. The problem is that in Global South, neither law nor ethics are mobilised to oppose the extermination dispositives. As Michel Foucault says, “*As more and more of our number die, the race to which we belong will*

become all the purer” (FOUCAULT, 2003: 257). The peripheral regions of capitalism, as the colony in the past, can welcome a necropolitical judicial regime without the liberal mythology being put in question. The peripheral region “*represents a site in which sovereignty fundamentally consists in exercising a power outside the law (ab legibus solutus) and in which “peace” is more likely to assume the face of “endless war”*” (MBEMBE, 2019: 76).

From this point, three forms of life are extracted that will be authors of this total continuous war: the Good Life of the rich and their helpers who must live well, the Survival of those who must live and work to sustain the Good Life of the former, and the Death of the “*Living Dead*”, who must die to guarantee the old alliance of the former two to sustain the order of (neo)colonial-(neo)liberal-capitalist domination. In this context, the old axiom of sovereignty, now diffused among the biggest accumulators of capital, applies to the elites, to the “super-rich”, new sovereign settlers of the “*Good Life*”: *le roi ne meurt jamais*.

5- Perspectives of future collaborations with the host laboratory

The collaboration with ICD Laboratory is continuous. I continue to participate regularly of several seminars organized by ICD on liberalism and neoliberalism, assuming the coordination of several seminar sessions through videoconferences. With Nathalie Champroux, we are finishing the last corrections of our manuscript for a book which will be published in June 2022: “*La valeur néolibérale de l'Humain. Capitalisme et biopolitique à l'ère pandémique*”. Several future collaborations are being organized: seminars and professorship project at Le Studium, as well as my “*habilitation à diriger les recherches*” (HDR) in François Rabelais University.

6- Articles published in the framework of the fellowship

- **BOOK** : DELUCHEY (Jean-François), CHAMPROUX (Nathalie) (Org.). *La valeur néolibérale de l'humain*.

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Capitalisme et biopolitique à l'ère pandémique. Paris : Éditions Kimé. To be published in June 2022.

- Published Article 1: DELUCHEY (Jean-François), DIAS (B. L.C.V.), “The ‘total continuous war’ and the Covid-19 pandemic: Neoliberal governmentality, disposable bodies and protected lives”. In *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, 2020. p. 1-18. This article was registered by the OMS in the database “Global Literature about Coronavirus”. The paper can be accessed using the following link: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1743872120973157>.
- Published Article 2: DELUCHEY (Jean-François), PELE (Antonio), “Au Brésil et ailleurs : Risques noirs, sécurité blanche”. In *The Conversation*, 07 dec. 2020. The paper can be accessed using the following link: <https://theconversation.com/au-bresil-et-ailleurs-risques-noirs-securite-blanche-151129>
- BOOK CHAPTER 1: DELUCHEY (Jean-François), “Historicité et legs de l’esclavage pour notre contemporanéité”. In COQUET-MOKOKO (C.), GAVOILLE (É.), TATIN-GOURIER (J.-J.), ZAPATA (M.) (dir.), *Esclavages et antiesclavagismes : réalités, discours et représentations*. Paris : Éditions Kimé, 2021, p. 219-230.
- BOOK CHAPTER 2: DELUCHEY (Jean-François), DIAS (B. L.C.V.), “A guerra revelada na pandemia: Bolsonaro e os corpos descartáveis dos brasileiros”, In AUGUSTO (C. B.), DORNELLES (J. R.), SANTOS (R. D.) & RAMOS FILHO (W.), *Novas Direitas no Brasil. Pandemias e Pandemônio – Vol. II*, São Paulo: Tirant Lo Blanch, 2021, p. 160-171.
- Contributions to the Book: DARDOT (P.), GUÉGUEN (H.), LAVAL (C.), SAUVÊTRE (P.), *Le choix de la guerre civile. Une autre histoire du néolibéralisme*. Montréal : Lux. 2021.

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